

DA 69

.3

· H3 M3

DA 69
.3
.H3 M3
Copy 1

A VISIT TO DOUGLAS HAIG

BY
ISAAC F. MARCOSSON

REPRINTED FROM "EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE"

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
PUBLISHERS IN AMERICA FOR HODDER & STOUGHTON

MCMXVII

COPYRIGHT, 1917,
BY THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

By Transfer
MAY 6 1919

DA 69
1/3
H3M3

A VISIT TO SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

FOR days I had run the gamut of the guns: I ranged the whole far-flung British battle-line until the world seemed a tumult of trench and traffic shaken by a deadly din. Suddenly I came to a quiet backwater near this whirlpool of war.

It was a modest château well off the beaten road, so screened by French poplars that its quietude suggested the aloof and untroubled days of peace. The red flag that fluttered at the gate, the presence of more than the usual number of sentries, the distant rumble of artillery, were the only external evidences that this secluded house which basked in the winter sun was linked with the world's greatest conflict.

Yet amid those friendly trees is the nerve centre of the mightiest English military machine ever created: from its pleasant drawing-room that looks out upon an old-world garden are issued the commands at which millions of armed men leap to action: toward it countless anxious hearts turn every day for the tidings of cheer or despair. For here are the Headquarters of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of all the British Armies in France and Flanders.

I have seen Army and Corps Headquarters far

more pretentious than the domicile that shelters the Chieftain of them all. It is characteristic of the silent soldier who literally wields the power of life and death that the seat of his fateful authority should be like the man himself—simple, dignified, impressive. You get a hint of Haig before you see him.

The environment of the Commander-in-Chief is strongly suggestive of his conduct of the war. Before war became a thing of precise science the Headquarters of an Army Head seethed with all the picturesque details so common to pictures of martial life. Couriers mounted on foam-flecked horses dashed to and fro: the air was vibrant with action: the fate of battle showed on the face of the humblest orderly.

But to-day “G.H.Q.”—as headquarters are familiarly known—are totally different. Although army units have risen from thousands to millions of men, and fields of operations stretch from sea to sea, and more ammunition is expended in a single engagement than was employed in entire wars of other days, absolute serenity prevails. It is only when your imagination conjures up the picture of flame and fury that lie beyond the horizon line that you get a thrill.

An occasional motor-car driven by a soldier-chauffeur chugs up the gravel road to the château, and from it emerge earnest-faced officers whose visits are usually brief. Neither time nor words are wasted when myriad lives hang in the balance and an Empire is at stake. War is swift and brooks no delay. Inside and out there is an atmosphere of quiet confidence, born of unobtrusive efficiency.

This is due first of all to the fact that it is the Haig way of doing things; second, because war now is a vast, well-oiled industry carried on with such perfect organisation that to the American trained to study the mechanics of huge corporations in his own country it seems strangely familiar. Make the most elemental comparison and you see at once how close the parallel is.

That modest French château hemmed in by poplars is nothing more or less than the Executive Office of the deadliest but best organised business in the world. It houses the mainspring of the most colossal system of merchandising that commerce has ever known. Strip away the glamour, and it is merely merchandising with men instead of goods. You have every consecutive process of business evolution. Instead of representing the conversion of pig-iron into motors, it expresses the translation of raw human material into expert fighting men. In the operations of battling armies you have the scientific incarnation of the greatest of all business problems—distribution. Clash in war is the prototype of the keenly developed competition of peace. In a word, the competition between nations takes the form of war.

From a different angle the Commander-in-Chief bears the same relation to the carrying on of war that a Master Sales Manager bears to the dissemination of a product. His task is to deploy his output where it can hit the hardest, and on the success of this alignment his Cause stands or falls.

What would represent profit in trade is here expressed in terms of advance—in territory

4 A VISIT TO SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

gained. The highest dividend is victory; the permanent aftermath is peace and liberty.

Study Haig and the British Army at close range and you find that war is work—the most difficult, desperate, and unremitting labour that the hand and brain of man ever devised. The price of freedom as fought for on the battlefields of Europe to-day is infinite but organised toil knit by sacrifice and fed by fire.

Now you see why it is important for America to get some idea of the kind of man who is shaping the field destiny of that magnificent army which represents in this momentous hour the hope of the world and likewise, to no small degree, our own future peace and prosperity.

To write of Sir Douglas Haig, therefore, is to write not only of the conspicuous military leadership but also of the kindling response that an untrained and undisciplined people made to organised and long-pending aggression, and this narrative conveys a lesson to America as stirring as it is significant.

THE NERVE CENTRE OF WAR

Ever since the beginning of the present war the average American has constantly asked himself: "How is a war involving millions of men and extending over an immense area conducted?" He is baffled by problems of transport and communication, demand and supply. Shells are no respecters of hunger or sleep. He wonders how soldiers are fed when death lurks at every turn; he marvels that armies of two nations, each speaking a different language and operating in sepa-

rate spheres, can co-operate and co-ordinate. All this and much more piles up the huge question: "How is it done?"

You find much of the answer crystallised in one phrase—team-work. It is the essence of the formula which expresses the success of Sir Douglas Haig and explains the advance of the British Army. If such a thing were possible you would find it emblazoned over the doorway of that unassuming Headquarters château "somewhere in France."

Thus the work-together idea, which in war spells the brotherhood of the firing line, lies at the very root of all that Britain's khaki-clad host has achieved on the Western front. The guide, compass and friend is the Commander-in-Chief. At his disposal are placed the human battalions; all the materials with which to feed and fight. Up to him is put squarely the task of translating those units into victory. To get at the procedure you must first have some revelation of the man, his personality and his methods. In them are reflected the whole process by which battle is born. Know them and you learn what costly and actual experience alone can teach—that the path of glory is paved with innumerable unromantic and lustreless details, and that the soldier who goes forth to do or die is a cog in a mighty and militant machine.

In scientific distribution of labour and systematic economy of operation, the British Army represents a thousand United States Steel Corporations piled on end and then some. The cohesion that binds it, the energy that galvanises it, the fervour that animates it, and the pure genius

that drives it day and night would stoke an Empire—almost reorganise a world. Gear all this concentrated force up to constructive business enterprise and it would show a balance-sheet that dripped with profit!

You have only to carry the commercial analogy one step further to discover the thing that dominates and makes possible every important American corporate undertaking—namely, a highly centralised direction vested with complete authority. In this case it happens to be the Commander-in-Chief, or, in plain business terms, General Manager of the British Armies, Unlimited.

Disclose the Haig make-up and you also reveal the human stuff that leads the forlorn hope. It is the universal fibre of the British soldier. The moral of it is that you cannot get away from that ancient maxim: “Like officers, like men.”

THE IMPERTURBABLE HAIG

To the human interest historian, and more especially the vendor of popularity, Haig presents a curious paradox. I will tell you why.

Ask any man that you meet casually in London what he knows about the Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies and he will reply at once: “Why, he is a great soldier.” Press him for further illuminating facts and the chances are that he will falter and hesitate, and then say: “The fact is I don’t really know any more.” It would be a typical experience in the hunt for Haig data.

The first of the many striking things about Sir Douglas Haig lies in the amazing anomaly that,

while his name appears every day in countless newspapers throughout the world (he signs the daily reports of British operations in France), he is perhaps the least advertised factor in all the tremendous drama that he directs. When you meet him you discover the reason.

He is the personification of personal modesty—not the professional modesty which is one of the surest roads to publicity, but a deep-seated and sincere aversion to exploitation that is one of his most marked characteristics. He shuns the lime-light.

I have talked with men who have been his comrades from South Africa to the Somme. Save for the most superficial information, they know nothing about him except that he has “made good” wherever he has been put. “He doesn’t talk much. He is a Fifer,” they say.

Right here you get the first ray of light on the Haig reserve, for he was born in the little Scottish kingdom of Fife, where courage is as adamant as its granite hills, and whence sprang the Clan MacDuff, foremost fighters of a fighting race. The imperturbability of those brooding hills is his soul. It has helped to make him the soldier he is.

It girded him with the strength and perseverance to lead the famous ride to the relief of Kimberley; it bore him through the heroic retreat from Mons; it sustained and fortified him when he rode serenely down the shattered lines of Ypres, and gave life and lift to one of the most brilliant stands that military resistance has known.

Sir Douglas Haig had cut his fighting teeth

when he succeeded Lord French as Commander-in-Chief in France.

Despite his long record of achievement, his name was far from being a household word like those of Kitchener and Roberts. But the important fact was that the troops knew him—knew to their pride and to their satisfaction that the new leader, like the old, had been flame-tried and not found wanting.

I like to remember my first glimpse of the Field-Marshal. It came after unforgettable days and nights with armies that flirted with death above, below and upon the ground. His name ran like a strain up and down the line. I had watched troops return from a raid that had netted a good bag of prisoners, and heard the jubilant officer in charge say: "This will be good news for the Chief at G.H.Q." It was more like the enthusiasm of a foot-ball player after a hard-won game than the satisfaction that followed a desperate dash that took its toll of youth and blood. But it was typical of what the man on the job thought of the man higher up, and it expressed also, I might add, the spirit of the English officer, who looks upon war as a great adventure.

And so it came about that, after a vicarious apprenticeship to the trade of war, I came upon its Master Workman. It was a brilliant, sunlit winter day. Behind us on the main highways I had left the endless ammunition trains, the trailing squadrons of motor trucks, the rattling processions of artillery—all the clatter and paraphernalia of war transport. Only the boom of guns still pounded in my ears. They had echoed

so long that they seemed part of the very noises of nature.

We turned off the chief artery of traffic and travelled for miles along sequestered ways. Soon a simple château loomed above ivied walls, and, almost before I realised it, we had run the gauntlet of the sentries at the gate and had brought up before a doorway that would have delighted the heart of the architectural enthusiast. A few years before, laughing children had played under its arch and glad voices had resounded through the hall that stretched behind. Although now an outpost of war it still breathed some of the gentle atmosphere of peace. The continuous jangle of the telephone was the only harsh sound that broke what seemed to all intents and purposes the ordinary calm of a well-ordered French country house.

There was the usual courteous greeting so instinctive with the British officer, whether you wade to him through the mud of a trench or meet him amid the comforts of humane habitation.

In France all the headquarters of the various British Armies are very much alike in that they are established in châteaux. Instead of being commandeered after the German fashion they are rented and paid for in pursuance of the laws of decency and honour.

Whether by accident or design, the General Headquarters are smaller and more unpretentious than any of the others. One reason is that Sir Douglas Haig is surrounded only by his personal staff. The other officers who comprise his field Cabinet live not far away.

So noiseless is the conduct of these dynamos

of war that, save for the constant movement of officers, you would never guess that from within its walls issue the orders that, translated into action, are changing the map of the world.

The establishment over which the Commander-in-Chief presides is practically as its owners left it. Indeed, the château that he occupied prior to the time when I visited him was still tenanted by the old French family whose home it had been for years, and who had inhabited one of the wings. Hence it came about that in those soul-stirring days, when the first Somme offensive was being planned and executed, the voices of children running up and down the halls mingled with the incessant murmur of the guns and the work of that devoted band of men, who then, as now, were directing one of the most stupendous operations in the history of all war.

A BORN SOLDIER

The moment you enter "G.H.Q." you feel that you have established a contact with something significant. I do not mean that there is the slightest tension, but, whether it is the play of the imagination or not, you acknowledge an authority that you have never felt before. It is the unconscious tribute that you pay to the personality that dominates the place.

The desks, maps and eternal telephone are in sharp contrast with the ancient furniture and works of art that still remain in the house. The old family portraits look down solemnly upon you from the walls. They hear and see strange things these strenuous days—nothing stranger than the

spectacle of the once detested English in the role of defenders of the invaded and beloved France.

I sat chatting with a young staff officer in one of the small ante-rooms that led off from the main hall. His telephone-bell rang incessantly. During a lull the door at my right opened, and remained open after a Military Secretary had passed out.

I looked through the doorway and saw a tall, lithe, well-knit man with the insignia of a Field-Marshal on his shoulder-straps. He sat at a plain, flat-topped desk earnestly studying a report. In a moment he straightened up, pushed a button, and my companion said:

“The Commander-in-Chief will see you now.”

The Haig welcome is a sufficient rebuke to whatever legend of his aloofness that may exist. I found myself in a presence that, without the slightest clue to its profession, would have unconsciously impressed itself as military.

Dignity, distinction and a gracious reserve mingle in his bearing; I have rarely seen a masculine face so handsome and yet so strong. His hair is fair, and his clear, almost steely blue eyes search you, but not unkindly. His chest is broad and deep, yet scarcely broad enough for the rows of Service and Order ribbons that plant a mass of colour against the background of khaki.

The Commander-in-Chief’s cavalry training sticks out all over him. You see it in the long, shapely lines of his legs and in the rounded calves, shod in perfectly polished boots, with their jingle of silver spurs. He stands easily and gracefully, and walks with that rangy, swinging stride oddly enough so common to men who ride much. He

was a famous fox-hunter in his student days at Oxford, and never, save in times of utmost crisis, does he forgo his daily gallop. To him the motor is a business vehicle, never meant for sport or pleasure. In brief, Sir Douglas Haig is the literal personification of what the man meant when he made the phrase: "every inch a soldier."

I have seen most of the Chiefs of the Allied Armies in this war. It is no depreciation of any of them to say that the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army is the best groomed and most soldierly looking of them all. He has none of that purely paternal quality which impresses you the moment you see Joffre: he is smarter and more alert in appearance than Nivelle. Under all the racking burden of a super-responsibility, he remains a cheerful, interested human being, who can forget in the distraction of lay discussion the anxieties and agonies that lurk almost within gunshot of his residence.

The room which is to-day the Capitol of British Military Sovereignty in France is a conventional drawing-room which, like the rest of the house, maintains practically every detail of the original furnishing. But it is a soldier's workshop nevertheless, and with all the working tools.

Chief among them when I called was an immense relief map of the whole Somme region. It rested on a large table just behind the Field-Marshal's desk. Over this inert and unresponsive mass of grey and green clay, criss-crossed with red lines, he had pondered through many a wakeful hour. On it is written the whole triumphant story of that great advance which registered a new glory for British arms.

I could not help thinking, as I sat there before a blazing fire, what a great place in history that simple room would have: how, in years to come, it would be known as the real setting of the decisive phases of the Great War, so far as land operations are concerned.

“THE WAR OF YOUTH”

We spoke of many things that winter day in France—of America, of world polities, and of the spiritual aftermath of the war, strange contrast as that was to the business of slaughter that raged around us.

The Field-Marshal’s voice is low and deep—almost musical. He is as sparing of words as he is of men. In his conversation he reminds me of some of those great American Captains of Capital—men like Rogers, Ryan, and Harriman who, like himself, believed in action and not speech: men, too, who minimised the value of their own utterances and who, when drawn out of the shell of their taciturnity, disclosed views of force and originality.

Like many men of great reserve, the Field-Marshal would rather face the jaws of death than an interviewer. Indeed, you could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that he has actually talked for publication, and then have some to spare.

Yet this quiet man, at whose command the very earth trembles with passion and noise, is very human. One of the ironies of this war is that the most inhuman of professions is directed by the most human of men.

He asked me what I thought of the work of the

armies in the field. I told him that, after their splendid team-work, their moral, and their efficiency, one of the things that impressed me most was the youth I saw everywhere—a rosy, almost radiant youth, that walked into death blithe and unafraid.

I was with Sir Douglas Haig in those momentous days when America broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, and when those of us temporarily exiled abroad believed that the time had at last come when we would actively take our place in the line-up of the Great Cause. This naturally led to the subject of what war had done for the Overseas peoples, and by them was specifically meant those gallant Sons of Empire who had heeded the call of the Mother Lioness and had left bush and range and field to fight in far-off lands.

Rash prophecy is remote from the Haig scheme of life. Although inarticulate about himself, he has always favoured the frankest publicity about his Army and the performance of his men. The brief and businesslike reports of operations that emanate each day from his Headquarters—they are almost epigrammatic—are eminently characteristic of the man whose name they bear.

Yet behind the unvarnished statement that “a trench was taken at —” often lies an unwritten classic of courage—an unheralded epic of sacrifice.

THE HAIG PERSONALITY

But underneath all this poverty of Haig expression lies a mine of unexplored human material,

whose richest vein is the real personality of the man himself.

War, which is usually the graveyard of reputations, has raised him to eminence without disclosing those intimate facts which are so necessary to the study of an individual and his achievement. Because of this famine of published information, no less marked in Great Britain than in America, it seems worth while to dwell for a moment on the story of his life. This will help you to understand why he has attained such eminence and how he has welded those hosts, gathered from the uttermost ends of the earth, into a coherent, elastic, ever-ready and dependable force that works with the precision of the most delicate mechanism.

Most people know that Haig is a Fifer, but what they do not know is the very illuminating fact that from his boyhood he aspired to be a soldier. This ambition took definite form at Oxford, where he was a student at Brasenose College. He was never the "hail-fellow-well-met" sort of person. Reserve was his hall-mark. But he was always an outdoor man: he invariably rode a big grey horse every afternoon, and he spent all his leisure time fox-hunting.

In those days to be an officer was more of a luxury than a real profession in England. The country had so adapted itself to the buying of commissions that when a man regarded the Army as a definite career he became marked. As a matter of fact, as Haig rode through the streets of Oxford and out across the lovely countryside that lies adjacent, he was often pointed out. His colleagues would say:

“There goes young Haig. He is going to be a soldier.”

Little did they dream that the fair-haired boy who sat so erect in his saddle would lead one of the greatest armies in the annals of all military endeavour, and that he would be the inspiration that made soldiering a sacred calling.

Then, as now, Sir Douglas gave the impression of a great store of latent energy—of reserved vitality. Few were ever deceived by his quietness into thinking that he was apathetic.

His first military experience was in the cavalry which he has always loved, and his initial promotion came from gallant service on the hot sands of the Soudan. In the South African War he took first rank as a cavalry leader. He had so many narrow escapes from death that he came to be known as “Lucky Haig.”

As you analyse the Haig personality you find that he has an amazing insight—a real gift of constructive forecast. His appraisal of the German menace will illustrate this. More than twenty years ago he went to Germany for a long visit. As a result of that journey he wrote a long letter to Sir Evelyn Wood which, in view of the vortex of bloody events of the present day, is little short of uncanny. A friend who saw that letter has summed it up as “one of practical insight, mastery of detail, shrewd prophecy and earnest warning.” The future Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France was then convinced of the inevitability of the coming conflict with the Kaiser, and he felt strongly the urgent need of preparedness for the struggle which he knew would uproot all Europe.

But his warnings, like those of his great colleague Lord Roberts in England, and those of General Leonard Wood in America, fell on deaf and unheeding ears. I cite this episode merely to show that Haig, like many another prophet, was not without honour, save in his own land, and also that he has the quality of vision which is the indispensable attribute of every leader of men.

He had ample opportunity to impress his executive ability as Chief of Staff in India, and he had just begun to execute some of his striking ideas of training as Commander at Aldershot (England's great military camp) when the Great War broke out. He was in at the beginning, and he has been on the firing line ever since. In the rack and agony of those first fighting months he saw the hideous harvest that unpreparedness reaps.

Of these two heroic Army Corps—the famous “First Seven Divisions”—that Lord French took to the rescue in France in that historic August of 1914 (the intrepid force, by the way, that the Kaiser called “the contemptible little English army”), Haig commanded the First, which included much of the cavalry.

From Mons to Ypres he was in the thick of battle, never depressed, never elated, his courage and example acting like a talisman of strength on tired and war-worn troopers who fought valiantly against odds the like of which had not been recorded almost since Thermopylæ. It is such a continuous tale of heroism, in which the humblest Tommy had his full share, that it is difficult to extract a single incident.

Out of all that welter of work and fight let us

take one story which, almost more than any other, reveals the grit and stamina that are Sir Douglas Haig's. It was at the first battle of Ypres, when that immortal thin line of British khaki, bent but not broken, stemmed the mighty German avalanche and blocked the passage to the sea. Outnumbered more than ten to one in some places, it fought with that desperate and dogged tenacity which has always been the inheritance of the British soldier.

Every impromptu trench was a Valhalla of English gallantry. Deeds that in other wars would have stood out conspicuously were here merged into an unending succession of acts of deathless glory.

The then Commander-in-Chief had been down to the front line.

"We can't hold out much longer," said a colonel. "It is impossible."

"I only want men who can do the impossible," replied Lord French. "You must hold." And the line held.

To the right of Ypres things were going badly. The deluge of German shell was well-nigh unbearable. Even the most heroic courage could not prevail against such uneven balance of strength. The cry was for men, and yet every man was engaged.

It was on that memorable day—for ever unique in the history of British arms—that cooks, servants, and orderlies went up into the firing line, and the man who exchanged the frying-pan for the rifle achieved a record of bravery as imperishable as his comrade long trained to fight. Still the lines shook under that mighty Teutonic

assault. It seemed more than human endurance could possibly stand.

Meanwhile Sir Douglas Haig had been ordered into the shambles with the First Corps. They manned the bloody breach and won for all time to come the title of the "Iron Brigade," even as Haig himself in other and equally strenuous days had gained the sobriquet of "Ironside." The old metal rang true.

Now came the event which bound the silent Fifer to his men with hooks of steel. For twenty-four hours the furies of battle had raged. The German bombardment was now a hideous storm of dripping death. The Prussian Guard rose like magic legions out of the ground. They had just broken through one British line and small parties of khaki-clad troops were in retreat.

Suddenly down the Menin Road, and with Ypres silhouetted behind like a mystic city shrouded with smoke, rode Sir Douglas Haig—trim, well-groomed, serene, sitting his horse erect and unafraid, and with an escort of his own 17th Lancers as perfectly turned out as on a peace parade. Overhead was the incessant shriek of shells, and all around carnage reigned. A thrill of spontaneous admiration swept over those tired and battered troops, for the spectacle they beheld was as unlike war as night is unlike day.

The effect of that calm and confident presence acted like a cooling draught on a parched tongue. It galvanised the waning strength in the gory trenches: the retreat became an advance and the broken line was restored. Haig had turned the tide.

I have seen that Menin Road down which Haig

rode with his unuttered message of faith. Two years had passed, but it was still the highway of death, for shrapnel rained all around. It was only accessible to the civilian willing to take the risk. How much more deadly was it when the blue-eyed man who now rules the British Armies in France gave that amazing evidence of his disregard of danger! I thought of it then, and again on that winter day when I sat talking with him amid the comparative ease and comfort of General Headquarters.

A few days after the event I have just described Haig had one of his close calls from death. A German shell burst in the midst of his headquarters and nearly every one of his staff officers was killed or maimed. The Field-Marshal was out on a tour of inspection at the time. "Lucky Haig" again.

When Haig became Commander-in-Chief it seemed the logical goal of a long period of stalwart preparation—an inevitable thing. For deep down under the Haig character, and incidentally behind his distinguished achievements, are two shining qualities—patience and perseverance. He has never hesitated to do what we in America call "spade-work." It is sometimes prosaic, but it is usually effective.

Contradictory as it may seem when you consider his Scottish ancestry, there must somewhere be a touch of the Oriental in Sir Douglas Haig. I mean, of course, that phase of his character which finds expression in persistent and methodical preparedness. His whole career is literally a dramatisation of an ancient Moslem

proverb, which reads: "Patience is the key to Paradise."

Take the Somme offensive. Nothing could express the Haig idea better. For months everybody knew that the "big push" was booked. There were many times during the lull that preceded the advance when men less cautious would have loosed the dogs of war that tugged so hard at the leash. But the Field-Marshal, with that super-patience which makes him almost Job-like, waited until the last and most minute detail was ready. Then he shot his bolt—and it went home. It was a triumph of the readiness which is the basic principle of the Haig creed.

What is known as the "Haig nibble" is another conspicuous example of his technique. In this war the open engagement is the rare exception. After the first few months it developed into a trial by trench—to a wearing-down process. Attrition is what the experts call it. Nothing could suit the Field-Marshal's temperament better. A method of campaign that would discourage most Commanders and lead them on to indiscretion has made it possible for him to push steadily and stolidly on.

What has been the result? The giant British Army mouse nibbled at the German front in the West so consistently that towards the end of February the great retreat began which netted the English many miles of bloodless gain.

PLAYING THE WAR GAME

This, then, is the type of man who sits at the flat-topped desk at General Headquarters with

his finger on the pulse of that long-drawn battle-line and responsive to its remotest quiver. The marvel of motor, telegraph, and telephone enables him to be in constant touch with every unit of his command. Follow him through his day's work and you see how the game of war is played—a war that, having tested the resource and resiliency of all Europe, has now extended its dread domain beyond the reaches of the Atlantic to the shores of America.

It is only when you have been to the war that you can appreciate the qualifications necessary for its conduct. To visualise it properly requires a “ten-league canvas” splashed with “brushes of comets’ hair.” No written account can convey an adequate impression of the huge hosts involved, the widespread scope of operations, the immense problems of transport (the British Armies in France have built and operate sufficient railway mileage to duplicate the whole Pennsylvania system), all the needs and exactions of that throbbing zone of conflict which, if employed for peace, would populate and perpetuate a kingdom.

In the midst of this monster destruction an enormous conservation is achieved. Only the dead are laid away. Nothing is “scrapped.” They make laces out of cast-off shoes: redeem shattered guns, convert refuse fat into glycerine, replenish the flickering fires of life itself. War is not all waste.

And when this moving picture—more animated than any imaginative play ever thrown upon cinema screen—has passed before you, you realise that even before a single shot is fired dynamic

energy and organisation of the highest order have been tested to a well-nigh incredible extent.

It dawns on you that War is indeed Work!

Since the Commander-in-Chief himself is the incarnation of systematic labour, it follows that the daily procedure of that modest establishment which he rules "somewhere in France" is efficient and effective. Taking its cue from the top, nothing disturbs the tenour of its way. Triumph or disaster are treated just the same. The unflinching discipline which binds the head of the armies to his closest colleagues has made possible a consistent and unwavering progress of the war.

Every morning at nine o'clock Sir Douglas Haig is at his desk, and from that time until the lunch gong sounds he is in conference with the head of those various branches of the Service whose efforts comprise the total of war operations. Upon his desk are heaped the reports of everything that happened the night before. A raid on forty yards of trench many miles away may reveal information of utmost importance to the whole army. Thus the office becomes a clearing-house of information, and out of it emerges the news, grave or cheery, that is flashed to a waiting world, and likewise those more significant commands whose execution makes history.

The process of assembling and assimilating all the news of that far-flung front is reduced to a very simple science. This is because each army unit has its own headquarters—a replica in every detail of the chief establishment. The difference between these lesser headquarters and the master one is that at the former must be handled, in addition to actual fighting and flying, the terrific

task of providing food and ammunition, ambulance and hospital relief, remounts and renewal of rank and personnel.

But all this is so admirably organised that, no matter what the stress of storm or struggle, the food is always at the distribution point, ammunition is constantly piled up at gun or trench, tender hands are ever ready to succour the wounded or bury the slain. It is the absolute infallibility of this system, which includes, among many details, a traffic police as competent as the blue-coats on Broadway or Fifth Avenue in New York, that stamps itself as the supreme miracle of the war.

The mystery of close and continuous contact between the Allied Armies is easily explained. It is accomplished by means of what is known as a *liaison* officer or group of officers. They are precisely what this French word means—a connection. There is a French mission or liaison with all high British Commands, and vice versa. Through this medium all communication is made and all news of operations transmitted. It is swift, simple and direct.

So, too, with that monster agency of devastation—the modern battle. Go behind the scenes and you find that, like every other detail of the war, it is merely a matter of systematic, calculated detail. It is like a super-selling campaign conducted by the best organised business concern in the world.

In former days when wars were decided by a single heroic engagement, armies stood to their arms for hours before battle while the Commander rode up and down the lines giving the men cheer and encouragement. To-day the Com-

mander who tried that trick would live about two consecutive seconds, because the long arm of artillery, which has annihilated distance, would wipe him out also.

Instead, the Commander-in-Chief remains many miles behind the front, bound to it by every means that constant communication devises. He has before him photographs of every inch of enemy ground taken by aviators. The wonderful thing about modern battle planning is that by means of these aerial pictures it is possible to keep the panorama of the battle-ground up to date to the very minute. In winter, for example, a fall of snow will greatly alter the whole situation. But the aerial photographer gets around this by making a series of pictures that show the enemy trenches before, *during* and after the snow fall.

The plan of a great campaign like the Somme is built out of months of preparation and conference. The Commander-in-Chief decides on the general scheme, while the specific tasks are assigned for execution to the various army commanders. In other words, every chief and the men under him have a particular job to do, and it is up to them to do it. The total of these jobs, some of them requiring months of solid effort, comprise the offensive. War nowadays is a series of so-called offensives enlisting millions of men and ranging over hundreds of miles of front. It is devoid of thrill: you never see a flag: it is literally the hardest kind of "spade work."

As you watch the organisation of the British Armies in France unfold, you become more and more impressed with their kinship with Big Busi-

ness as we know it in America. Like Andrew Carnegie, Sir Douglas Haig leans on experts. He assumes that a man who has devoted a large part of his life to a specific task knows all about it and is to be trusted. He has gathered about him, therefore, a group of keen, alert, and live-minded advisers. Some of them served their apprenticeship in other wars; others have been swiftly seasoned in the present struggle. They represent the very flower of service and experience. It is a remarkable company—these men who move so noiselessly, who work so loyally, who keep incessant vigil with war.

There is still another link with business. In many large commercial establishments in the United States you find a so-called suggestion-box. Into it the humblest employees may drop a suggestion for the improvement of the business. It ranges from a plan for a more methodical arrangement of office stationery to a whole new system of time and labour-saving machinery. In many cases prizes are offered for the best suggestion made during the year.

There is no such box at General Headquarters, but its informal substitute is the meal-table, where both civilian and soldier have free play not only to inquire of the branch of service in which they are most interested, but to make any suggestion that may be born of observation.

No recommendation is too modest or too far-fetched to have the serious and courteous consideration of the kindly man who sits at the head of the table.

Nor is all the talk of "Shop." War is sometimes subordinated to the less ravaging things

that are happening out in the busy world where there is no rumble of guns, no clash of armed men, and where life is not one bombardment after another. And sometimes, too, there is talk of those haunts and homes across the sea where brave hearts yearn and where the agony of war suspense is not less searching than at the fighting front. They also serve who wait alone.

On every detail of daily life at General Headquarters the Field-Marshal's character is impressed. After lunch, for example, he spends an hour alone, and in this period of meditation the whole fateful panorama of the war passes before him. When it is over the wires splutter and the fierce life of the coming night—the Army does not begin to fight until most people go to sleep—is ordained.

This finished, the brief period of respite begins. Rain or shine, his favourite horse is brought up to the door and he goes for a ride, usually accompanied by one or two young staff officers. I have seen Sir Douglas Haig galloping along those smooth French roads, head up, eyes ahead—a memorable figure of grace and motion. He rides like those latter-day Centaurs, the Australian ranger and the American cowboy. He seems part of his horse.

Home from the ride, there are more conferences; then dinner, with its lighter but always instructive talk and its relief from the strain of work.

That modest establishment is early to bed, but more than one guest at General Headquarters on the way to his chamber has passed the office of the Commander-in-Chief and seen him—a silent,

aloof, almost lonely figure—leaning over a map and beginning the nightly wrestle with the great problem that, reaching out from the friendly house amid the trees, touches and affects the destiny and safety of the whole world.

In that closing picture is the revelation of Haig the Man and Soldier. Like his conduct of the war, his personality is the concentrated sum of patient, persistent, untiring effort. Lacking the brilliancy of spectacular and shallow natures, it combines those elements of stamina and stick-to-it-iveness that rear in the end the impregnable bulwark of confidence and success.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 020 665 521 5

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 020 665 521 5

Hollinger Corp.

pH 8.5